A CHRISTMAS DREAM

LOUISA M. ALCOTT

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"'Here, my little girls, are two friends of those poor fellows yonder.'" — *Frontispiece.*

A

CHRISTMAS DREAM

BY

LOUISA M. ALCOTT

AUTHOR OF "LITTLE WOMEN," "LITTLE MEN," "SILVER PITCHERS," ETC.

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A CHRISTMAS DREAM, AND HOW IT CAME TRUE

"I'm so tired of Christmas I wish there never would be another one!" exclaimed a discontented-looking little girl, as she sat idly watching her mother arrange a pile of gifts two days before they were to be given.

"Why, Effie, what a dreadful thing to say! You are as bad as old Scrooge; and I'm afraid

something will happen to you, as it did to him, if you don't care for dear Christmas," answered mamma, almost dropping the silver horn she was filling with delicious candies.

"Who was Scrooge? What happened to him?" asked Effie, with a glimmer of interest in her listless face, as she picked out the sourest lemon-drop she could find; for nothing sweet suited her just then.

"He was one of Dickens's best people, and you can read the charming story some day. He hated Christmas until a strange dream showed him how dear and beautiful it was, and made a better man of him."

"I shall read it; for I like dreams, and have a great many curious ones myself. But they don't keep me from being tired of Christmas," said Effie, poking discontentedly among the sweeties for something worth eating.

"Why are you tired of what should be the happiest time of all the year?" asked mamma, anxiously.

"Perhaps I should n't be if I had something new. But it is always the same, and there is n't any more surprise about it. I always find heaps of goodies in my stocking. Don't like some of them, and soon get tired of those I do like.

We always have a great dinner, and I eat too much, and feel ill next day. Then there is a Christmas tree somewhere, with a doll on top, or a stupid old Santa Claus, and children dancing and screaming over bonbons and toys that break, and shiny things that are of no use. Really, mamma, I've had so many Christmases all alike that I don't think I *can* bear another one." And Effie laid herself flat on the sofa, as if the mere idea was too much for her.

Her mother laughed at her despair, but was sorry to see her little girl so discontented, when she had everything to make her happy, and had known but ten Christmas days.

"Suppose we don't give you *any* presents at all, — how would that suit you?" asked mamma, anxious to please her spoiled child.

"I should like one large and splendid one, and one dear little one, to remember some very nice person by," said Effie, who was a fanciful little body, full of odd whims and notions, which her friends loved to gratify, regardless of time, trouble, or money; for she was the last of three little girls, and very dear to all the family.

"Well, my darling, I will see what I can do to please you, and not say a word until all is ready. If I could only get a new idea to start

with!" And mamma went on tying up her pretty bundles with a thoughtful face, while Effie strolled to the window to watch the rain that kept her indoors and made her dismal.

"Seems to me poor children have better times than rich ones. I can't go out, and there is a girl about my age splashing along, without any maid to fuss about rubbers and cloaks and umbrellas and colds. I wish I was a beggar-girl."

"Would you like to be hungry, cold, and ragged, to beg all day, and sleep on an ash-heap at night?" asked mamma, wondering what would come next.

"Cinderella did, and had a nice time in the end. This girl out here has a basket of scraps on her arm, and a big old shawl all round her, and does n't seem to care a bit, though the water runs out of the toes of her boots. She goes paddling along, laughing at the rain, and eating a cold potato as if it tasted nicer than the chicken and ice-cream I had for dinner. Yes, I do think poor children are happier than rich ones."

"So do I, sometimes. At the Orphan Asylum to-day I saw two dozen merry little souls who have no parents, no home, and no hope of

Christmas beyond a stick of candy or a cake. I wish you had been there to see how happy they were, playing with the old toys some richer children had sent them."

"You may give them all mine; I 'm so tired of them I never want to see them again," said Effie, turning from the window to the pretty baby-house full of everything a child's heart could desire.

"I will, and let you begin again with something you will not tire of, if I can only find it." And mamma knit her brows trying to discover some grand surprise for this child who did n't care for Christmas.

Nothing more was said then; and, wandering off to the library, Effie found "A Christmas Carol," and, curling herself up in the sofa corner, read it all before tea. Some of it she did not understand; but she laughed and cried over many parts of the charming story, and felt better without knowing why.

All the evening she thought of poor Tiny Tim, Mrs. Cratchit with the pudding, and the stout old gentleman who danced so gayly that "his legs twinkled in the air." Presently bedtime arrived.

"Come, now, and toast your feet," said Effie's

nurse, "while I do your pretty hair and tell stories."

"I 'll have a fairy tale to-night, a very interesting one," commanded Effie, as she put on her blue silk wrapper and little fur-lined slippers to sit before the fire and have her long curls brushed.

So Nursey told her best tales; and when at last the child lay down under her lace curtains, her head was full of a curious jumble of Christmas elves, poor children, snow-storms, sugar-plums, and surprises. So it is no wonder that she dreamed all night, and this was the dream, which she never quite forgot.

She found herself sitting on a stone, in the middle of a great field, all alone. The snow was falling fast, a bitter wind whistled by, and night was coming on. She felt hungry, cold, and tired, and did not know where to go nor what to do.

"I wanted to be a beggar-girl, and now I am one; but I don't like it, and wish somebody would come and take care of me. I don't know who I am, and I think I must be lost," thought Effie, with the curious interest one takes in one's self in dreams.

But the more she thought about it, the more

bewildered she felt. Faster fell the snow, colder blew the wind, darker grew the night; and poor Effie made up her mind that she was quite forgotten and left to freeze alone. The tears were chilled on her cheeks, her feet felt like icicles, and her heart died within her, so hungry, frightened, and forlorn was she. Laying her head on her knees, she gave herself up for lost, and sat there with the great flakes fast turning her to a little white mound, when suddenly the sound of music reached her, and starting up, she looked and listened with all her eyes and ears.

Far away a dim light shone, and a voice was heard singing. She tried to run toward the welcome glimmer, but could not stir, and stood like a small statue of expectation while the light drew nearer, and the sweet words of the song grew clearer.

From our happy home
Through the world we roam
One week in all the year,
Making winter spring
With the joy we bring
For Christmas-tide is here.

Now the eastern star
Shines from afar

To light the poorest home;
Hearts warmer grow,
Gifts freely flow,
For Christmas-tide has come.

Now gay trees rise
Before young eyes,
Abloom with tempting cheer,
Blithe voices sing,
And blithe bells ring,
For Christmas-tide is here.

Oh, happy chime,
Oh, blessèd time,
That draws us all so near!
"Welcome, dear day,"
All creatures say,
For Christmas-tide is here.

A child's voice sang, a child's hand carried the little candle; and in the circle of soft light it shed, Effie saw a pretty child coming to her through the night and snow. A rosy, smiling creature, wrapped in white fur, with a wreath of green and scarlet holly on its shining hair, the magic candle in one hand, and the other outstretched as if to shower gifts and warmly press all other hands.

Effie forgot to speak as this bright vision came nearer, leaving no trace of footsteps in the snow, only lighting the way with its little candle, and filling the air with the music of its song.

"Dear child, you are lost, and I have come to find you," said the stranger, taking Effie's cold hands in his, with a smile like sunshine, while every holly berry glowed like a little fire.

"Do you know me?" asked Effie, feeling no fear, but a great gladness, at his coming.

"I know all children, and go to find them; for this is my holiday, and I gather them from all parts of the world to be merry with me once a year."

"Are you an angel?" asked Effie, looking for the wings.

"No; I am a Christmas spirit, and live with my mates in a pleasant place, getting ready for our holiday, when we are let out to roam about the world, helping make this a happy time for all who will let us in. Will you come and see how we work?"

"I will go anywhere with you. Don't leave me again," cried Effie, gladly.

"First I will make you comfortable. That is what we love to do. You are cold, and you shall be warm; hungry, and I will feed you; sorrowful, and I will make you gay."

With a wave of his candle all three miracles were wrought, — for the snow-flakes turned to a white fur cloak and hood on Effie's head and

shoulders; a bowl of hot soup came sailing to her lips, and vanished when she had eagerly drunk the last drop; and suddenly the dismal field changed to a new world so full of wonders that all her troubles were forgotten in a minute.

Bells were ringing so merrily that it was hard to keep from dancing. Green garlands hung on the walls, and every tree was a Christmas tree full of toys, and blazing with candles that never went out.

In one place many little spirits sewed like mad on warm clothes, turning off work faster than any sewing-machine ever invented, and great piles were made ready to be sent to poor people. Other busy creatures packed money into purses, and wrote checks which they sent flying away on the wind, — a lovely kind of snow-storm to fall into a world below full of poverty.

Older and graver spirits were looking over piles of little books, in which the records of the past year were kept, telling how different people had spent it, and what sort of gifts they deserved. Some got peace, some disappointment, some remorse and sorrow, some great joy and hope. The rich had generous thoughts sent them; the poor, gratitude and contentment. Children had more love and duty to parents;

"'I thought there was only one Santa Claus.'" — PAGE 11.

and parents renewed patience, wisdom, and satisfaction for and in their children. No one was forgotten.

"Please tell me what splendid place this is," asked Effie, as soon as she could collect her wits after the first look at all these astonishing things.

"This is the Christmas world; and here we work all the year round, never tired of getting ready for the happy day. See, these are the saints just setting off; for some have far to go, and the children must not be disappointed."

As he spoke the spirit pointed to four gates, out of which four great sleighs were just driving, laden with toys, while a jolly old Santa Claus sat in the middle of each, drawing on his mittens and tucking up his wraps for a long cold drive.

"Why, I thought there was only one Santa Claus, and even he was a humbug," cried Effie, astonished at the sight.

"Never give up your faith in the sweet old stories, even after you come to see that they are only the pleasant shadow of a lovely truth."

Just then the sleighs went off with a great jingling of bells and pattering of reindeer hoofs, while all the spirits gave a cheer that was heard

in the lower world, where people said, "Hear the stars sing."

"I never will say there is n't any Santa Claus again. Now, show me more."

"You will like to see this place, I think, and may learn something here perhaps."

The spirit smiled as he led the way to a little door, through which Effie peeped into a world of dolls. Baby-houses were in full blast, with dolls of all sorts going on like live people. Waxen ladies sat in their parlors elegantly dressed; black dolls cooked in the kitchens: nurses walked out with the bits of dollies: and the streets were full of tin soldiers marching, wooden horses prancing, express wagons rumbling, and little men hurrying to and fro. Shops were there, and tiny people buying legs of mutton, pounds of tea, mites of clothes, and everything dolls use or wear or want.

But presently she saw that in some ways the dolls improved upon the manners and customs of human beings, and she watched eagerly to learn why they did these things. A fine Paris doll driving in her carriage took up a black worsted Dinah who was hobbling along with a basket of clean clothes, and carried her to her journey's end, as if it were the proper thing to

do. Another interesting china lady took off her comfortable red cloak and put it round a poor wooden creature done up in a paper shift, and so badly painted that its face would have sent some babies into fits.

"Seems to me I once knew a rich girl who did n't give her things to poor girls. I wish I could remember who she was, and tell her to be as kind as that china doll," said Effie, much touched at the sweet way the pretty creature wrapped up the poor fright, and then ran off in her little gray gown to buy a shiny fowl stuck on a wooden platter for her invalid mother's dinner.

"We recall these things to people's minds by dreams. I think the girl you speak of won't forget this one." And the spirit smiled, as if he enjoyed some joke which she did not see.

A little bell rang as she looked, and away scampered the children into the red-and-green school-house with the roof that lifted up, so one could see how nicely they sat at their desks with mites of books, or drew on the inch-square blackboards with crumbs of chalk.

"They know their lessons very well, and are as still as mice. We make a great racket at our school, and get bad marks every day. I shall tell the girls they had better mind what they do,

or their dolls will be better scholars than they are," said Effie, much impressed, as she peeped in and saw no rod in the hand of the little mistress, who looked up and shook her head at the intruder, as if begging her to go away before the order of the school was disturbed.

Effie retired at once, but could not resist one look in at the window of a fine mansion, where the family were at dinner, the children behaved so well at table, and never grumbled a bit when their mamma said they could not have any more fruit.

"Now, show me something else," she said, as they came again to the low door that led out of Doll-land.

"You have seen how we prepare for Christmas; let me show you where we love best to send our good and happy gifts," answered the spirit, giving her his hand again.

"I know. I've seen ever so many," began Effie, thinking of her own Christmases.

"No, you have never seen what I will show you. Come away, and remember what you see to-night."

Like a flash that bright world vanished, and Effie found herself in a part of the city she had never seen before. It was far away from the

gayer places, where every store was brilliant with lights and full of pretty things, and every house wore a festival air, while people hurried to and fro with merry greetings. It was down among the dingy streets where the poor lived, and where there was no making ready for Christmas.

Hungry women looked in at the shabby shops, longing to buy meat and bread, but empty pockets forbade. Tipsy men drank up their wages in the bar-rooms; and in many cold dark chambers little children huddled under the thin blankets, trying to forget their misery in sleep.

No nice dinners filled the air with savory smells, no gay trees dropped toys and bonbons into eager hands, no little stockings hung in rows beside the chimney-piece ready to be filled, no happy sounds of music, gay voices, and dancing feet were heard; and there were no signs of Christmas anywhere.

"Don't they have any in this place?" asked Effie, shivering, as she held fast the spirit's hand, following where he led her.

"We come to bring it. Let me show you our best workers." And the spirit pointed to some sweet-faced men and women who came stealing

into the poor houses, working such beautiful miracles that Effie could only stand and watch.

Some slipped money into the empty pockets, and sent the happy mothers to buy all the comforts they needed; others led the drunken men out of temptation, and took them home to find safer pleasures there. Fires were kindled on cold hearths, tables spread as if by magic, and warm clothes wrapped round shivering limbs. Flowers suddenly bloomed in the chambers of the sick; old people found themselves remembered; sad hearts were consoled by a tender word, and wicked ones softened by the story of Him who forgave all sin.

But the sweetest work was for the children: and Effie held her breath to watch these human fairies hang up and fill the little stockings without which a child's Christmas is not perfect, putting in things that once she would have thought very humble presents, but which now seemed beautiful and precious because these poor babies had nothing.

"That is so beautiful! I wish I could make merry Christmases as these good people do, and be loved and thanked as they are," said Effie, softly, as she watched the busy men and women

do their work and steal away without thinking of any reward but their own satisfaction.

"You can if you will. I have shown you the way. Try it, and see how happy your own holiday will be hereafter."

As he spoke, the spirit seemed to put his arms about her, and vanished with a kiss.

"Oh, stay and show me more!" cried Effie, trying to hold him fast.

"Darling, wake up, and tell me why you are smiling in your sleep," said a voice in her ear; and, opening her eyes, there was mamma bending over her, and morning sunshine streaming into the room.

"Are they all gone? Did you hear the bells? Wasn't it splendid?" she asked, rubbing her eyes, and looking about her for the pretty child who was so real and sweet.

"You have been dreaming at a great rate, — talking in your sleep, laughing, and clapping your hands as if you were cheering some one. Tell me what was so splendid," said mamma, smoothing the tumbled hair and lifting up the sleepy head.

Then, while she was being dressed, Effie told her dream, and Nursey thought it very wonderful; but mamma smiled to see how curiously

things the child had thought, read, heard, and seen through the day were mixed up in her sleep.

"The spirit said I could work lovely miracles if I tried; but I don't know how to begin, for I have no magic candle to make feasts appear, and light up groves of Christmas trees, as he did," said Effie, sorrowfully.

"Yes, you have. We will do it! we will do it!" And clapping her hands, mamma suddenly began to dance all over the room as if she had lost her wits.

"How? how? You must tell me, mamma," cried Effie, dancing after her, and ready to believe anything possible when she remembered the adventures of the past night.

"I've got it! I've got it! — the new idea. A splendid one, if I can only carry it out!" And mamma waltzed the little girl round till her curls flew wildly in the air, while Nursey laughed as if she would die.

"Tell me! tell me!" shrieked Effie.

"No, no: it is a surprise, — a grand surprise for Christmas day!" sung mamma, evidently charmed with her happy thought. "Now, come to breakfast; for we must work like bees if we want to play spirits to-morrow. You and

Nursey will go out shopping, and get heaps of things, while I arrange matters behind the scenes."

They were running downstairs as mamma spoke, and Effie called out breathlessly, —

"It won't be a surprise; for I know you are going to ask some poor children here, and have a tree or something. It won't be like my dream; for they had ever so many trees, and more children than we can find anywhere."

"There will be no tree, no party, no dinner, in this house at all, and no presents for you. Won't that be a surprise?" And mamma laughed at Effie's bewildered face.

"Do it. I shall like it, I think; and I won't ask any questions, so it will all burst upon me when the time comes," she said; and she ate her breakfast thoughtfully, for this really would be a new sort of Christmas.

All that morning Effie trotted after Nursey in and out of shops, buying dozens of barking dogs, woolly lambs, and squeaking birds; tiny tea-sets, gay picture-books, mittens and hoods, dolls and candy. Parcel after parcel was sent home; but when Effie returned she saw no trace of them, though she peeped

everywhere. Nursey chuckled, but would n't give a hint, and went out again in the afternoon with a long list of more things to buy; while Effie wandered forlornly about the house, missing the usual merry stir that went before the Christmas dinner and the evening fun.

As for mamma, she was quite invisible all day, and came in at night so tired that she could only lie on the sofa to rest, smiling as if some very pleasant thought made her happy in spite of weariness.

"Is the surprise going on all right?" asked Effie, anxiously; for it seemed an immense time to wait till another evening came.

"Beautifully! better than I expected; for several of my good friends are helping, or I could n't have done it as I wish. I know you will like it, dear, and long remember this new way of making Christmas merry."

Mamma gave her a very tender kiss, and Effie went to bed.

The next day was a very strange one; for when she woke there was no stocking to examine, no pile of gifts under her napkin, no one

said "Merry Christmas!" to her, and the dinner was just as usual to her. Mamma vanished again, and Nursey kept wiping her eyes and saying: "The dear things! It 's the prettiest idea I ever heard of. No one but your blessed ma could have done it."

"Do stop, Nursey, or I shall go crazy because I don't know the secret!" cried Effie, more than once; and she kept her eye on the clock, for at seven in the evening the surprise was to come off.

The longed-for hour arrived at last, and the child was too excited to ask questions when Nurse put on her cloak and hood, led her to the carriage, and they drove away, leaving their house the one dark and silent one in the row.

"I feel like the girls in the fairy tales who are led off to strange places and see fine things," said Effie, in a whisper, as they jingled through the gay streets.

"Ah, my deary, it *is* like a fairy tale, I do assure you, and you *will* see finer things than most children will to-night. Steady, now, and do just as I tell you, and don't say one word, whatever you see," answered Nursey, quite quivering with excitement as she patted a large

box in her lap, and nodded and laughed with twinkling eyes.

They drove into a dark yard, and Effie was led through a back door to a little room, where Nurse coolly proceeded to take off not only her cloak and hood, but her dress and shoes also. Effie stared and bit her lips, but kept still until out of the box came a little white fur coat and boots, a wreath of holly leaves and berries, and a candle with a frill of gold paper round it. A long "Oh!" escaped her then; and when she was dressed and saw herself in the glass, she started back, exclaiming, "Why, Nursey, I look like the spirit in my dream!"

"So you do; and that's the part you are to play, my pretty! Now whist, while I blind your eyes and put you in your place."

"Shall I be afraid?" whispered Effie, full of wonder; for as they went out she heard the sound of many voices, the tramp of many feet, and in spite of the bandage, was sure a great light shone upon her when she stopped.

"You needn't be; I shall stand close by, and your ma will be there."

After the handkerchief was tied about her eyes, Nurse led Effie up some steps, and placed

her on a high platform, where something like leaves touched her head, and the soft snap of lamps seemed to fill the air.

Music began as soon as Nurse clapped her hands, the voices outside sounded nearer, and the tramp was evidently coming up the stairs.

"Now, my precious, look and see how you and your dear ma have made a merry Christmas for them that needed it!"

Off went the bandage; and for a minute Effie really did think she was asleep again, for she actually stood in "a grove of Christmas trees," all gay and shining as in her vision. Twelve on a side, in two rows down the room, stood the little pines, each on its low table; and behind Effie a taller one rose to the roof, hung with wreaths of popcorn, apples, oranges, horns of candy, and cakes of all sorts, from sugary hearts to gingerbread Jumbos. On the smaller trees she saw many of her own discarded toys and those Nursey bought, as well as heaps that seemed to have rained down straight from that delightful Christmas country where she felt as if she were again.

"How splendid! Who is it for? What is that noise? Where is mamma?" cried Effie,

pale with pleasure and surprise, as she stood looking down the brilliant little street from her high place.

Before Nurse could answer, the doors at the lower end flew open, and in marched twenty-four little blue-gowned orphan girls, singing sweetly, until amazement changed the song to cries of joy and wonder as the shining spectacle appeared. While they stood staring with round eyes at the wilderness of pretty things about them, mamma stepped up beside Effie, and holding her hand fast to give her courage, told the story of the dream in a few simple words, ending in this way: —

"So my little girl wanted to be a Christmas spirit too, and make this a happy day for those who had not as many pleasures and comforts as she has. She likes surprises, and we planned this for you all. She shall play the good fairy, and give each of you something from this tree, after which every one will find her own name on a small tree, and can go to enjoy it in her own way. March by, my dears, and let us fill your hands."

Nobody told them to do it, but all the hands were clapped heartily before a single child

"'March by, my dears, and let us fill your hands.'" — PAGE 24.

stirred; then one by one they came to look up wonderingly at the pretty giver of the feast as she leaned down to offer them great yellow oranges, red apples, bunches of grapes, bonbons, and cakes, till all were gone, and a double row of smiling faces turned toward her as the children filed back to their places in the orderly way they had been taught.

Then each was led to her own tree by the good ladies who had helped mamma with all their hearts; and the happy hubbub that arose would have satisfied even Santa Claus himself, — shrieks of joy, dances of delight, laughter and tears (for some tender little things could not bear so much pleasure at once, and sobbed with mouths full of candy and hands full of toys). How they ran to show one another the new treasures! how they peeped and tasted, pulled and pinched, until the air was full of queer noises, the floor covered with papers, and the little trees left bare of all but candles!

"I don't think heaven can be any gooder than this," sighed one small girl, as she looked about her in a blissful maze, holding her full apron with one hand, while she luxuriously carried sugar-plums to her mouth with the other.

"Is that a truly angel up there?" asked another, fascinated by the little white figure with the wreath on its shining hair, who in some mysterious way had been the cause of all this merry-making.

"I wish I dared to go and kiss her for this splendid party," said a lame child, leaning on her crutch, as she stood near the steps, wondering how it seemed to sit in a mother's lap, as Effie was doing, while she watched the happy scene before her.

Effie heard her, and remembering Tiny Tim, ran down and put her arms about the pale child, kissing the wistful face, as she said sweetly "You may; but mamma deserves the thanks. She did it all; I only dreamed about it."

Lame Katy felt as if "a truly angel" was embracing her, and could only stammer out her thanks, while the other children ran to see the pretty spirit, and touch her soft dress, until she stood in a crowd of blue gowns laughing as they held up their gifts for her to see and admire.

Mamma leaned down and whispered one word to the older girls; and suddenly they all took hands to dance round Effie, singing as they skipped.

It was a pretty sight, and the ladies found it hard to break up the happy revel; but it was late for small people, and too much fun is a mistake. So the girls fell into line, and marched before Effie and mamma again, to say good-night with such grateful little faces that the eyes of those who looked grew dim with tears. Mamma kissed every one; and many a hungry childish heart felt as if the touch of those tender lips was their best gift. Effie shook so many small hands that her own tingled; and when Katy came she pressed a small doll into Effie's hand, whispering, "You didn't have a single present, and we had lots. Do keep that; it's the prettiest thing I got."

"I will," answered Effie, and held it fast until the last smiling face was gone, the surprise all over, and she safe in her own bed, too tired and happy for anything but sleep.

"Mamma, it *was* a beautiful surprise, and I thank you so much! I don't see how you did it; but I like it best of all the Christmases I ever had, and mean to make one every year. I had my splendid big present, and here is the dear little one to keep for love of poor Katy; so even that part of my wish came true."

And Effie fell asleep with a happy smile on her lips, her one humble gift still in her hand, and a new love for Christmas in her heart that never changed through a long life spent in doing good.

BAA! BAA!

Baa the First

They did n't look at all like heroines, those two shabby little girls, as they trotted down the hill, leaving a cloud of dust behind them. Their bare feet were scratched and brown, their hands were red with berry stains, and their freckled faces shone with heat under the flapping sun-bonnets. But Patty and Tilda were

going to do a fine piece of work, although they did not know it then, and were very full of their own small affairs as they went briskly toward the station to sell berries.

The tongues went as fast as the feet; for this was a great expedition, and both were much excited about it.

"Don't they look lovely?" said Tilda, proudly surveying her sister's load, as she paused to change a heavy pail from one arm to the other.

"Perfectly de-licious! I know folks will buy 'em, if we ain't too scared to offer 'em," answered Patty, stopping also to settle the two dozen little birch baskets full of red raspberries which she carried, prettily set forth, on an old waiter, trimmed with scarlet bunch-berries, white everlasting, and green leaves.

"I sha'n't be. I'll go right along and holler real loud, — see if I don't. I'm bound to have our books and boots for next winter; so just keep thinking how nice they'll be, and push ahead," said stout-hearted Tilda, the leader of the expedition.

"Hurry up. I want to have time to sprinkle the posies, so they'll look fresh when the train comes. I hope there'll be lots of children in it; they always want to eat, ma says."

"It was real mean of Elviry Morris to go and offer to sell cheaper up to the hotel than we did, and spoil our market. Guess she'll wish she'd thought of this when we tell what we've done down here." And both children laughed with satisfaction as they trudged along, never minding the two hot, dusty miles they had to go.

The station was out of the village, and the long trains carrying summer travellers to the mountains stopped there once a day to meet the stages for different places. It was a pleasant spot, with a great pond on one side, deep forests on the other, and in the distance glimpses of gray peaks or green slopes inviting the weary city people to come and rest.

Every one seemed glad to get out during the ten minutes' pause, even if their journey was not yet ended; and while they stood about, enjoying the fresh air from the pond, or watching the stages load up, Tilda and Patty planned to offer their tempting little baskets of fresh fruit and flowers. It was a great effort, and their hearts beat with childish hope and fear as they came in sight of the station, with no one about but the jolly stage-drivers lounging in the shade.

"Plenty of time. Let's go to the pond and wash off the dust and get a drink. Folks won't

see us behind those cars," said Tilda, glad to slip out of sight till the train arrived: for even her courage seemed to ooze away as the important moment approached.

A long cattle-train stood on a side track waiting for the other one to pass; and while the little girls splashed their feet in the cool water, or drank from their hands, a pitiful sound filled the air. Hundreds of sheep, closely packed in the cars and suffering agonies from dust and heat and thirst, thrust their poor noses through the bars, bleating frantically; for the sight of all that water, so near yet so impossible to reach, drove them wild. Those farther down the track, who could not see the blue lake, could smell it, and took up the cry till the woods echoed with it, and even the careless drivers said, with a glance of pity, —

"Hard on the poor critters this hot day, ain't it?"

"Oh, Tilda, hear 'em baa, and see 'em crowd this side to get at the water! Let 's take 'em some in our pickin' dishes. It 's so dreadful to be dry," said tender-hearted Patty, filling her pint cup, and running to offer it to the nearest pathetic nose outstretched to meet it. A dozen thirsty tongues tried to lap it, and in the struggle

the little cup was soon emptied; but Patty ran for more, and Tilda did the same, both getting so excited over the distress of the poor creatures that they never heard the far-off whistle of their train, and continued running to and fro on their errand of mercy, careless of their own weary feet, hot faces, and the precious flowers withering in the sun.

They did not see a party of people sitting near by under the trees, who watched them and listened to their eager talk with smiling interest.

"Run, Patty; this poor little one is half dead. Throw some water in his face while I make this big one stop walking on him. Oh, dear! There are so many! We can't help half, and our mugs are so small!"

"I know what I'll do, Tilda, tip out the berries into my apron, and bring up a nice lot at once," cried Patty, half beside herself with pity.

"It will spoil your apron and mash the berries, but never mind. I don't care if we don't sell one if we can help these poor dear lammies," answered energetic Tilda, dashing into the pond up to her ankles to fill the pail, while Patty piled up the fruit in her plaid apron.

"Oh, my patience me! the train is coming!" cried Patty, as a shrill shriek woke the echoes, and an approaching rumble was heard.

"Let it come. I won't leave this sheep till it's better. You go and sell the first lot; I'll come as quick as I can," commanded Tilda, so busy reviving the exhausted animal that she could not stop even to begin the cherished new plan.

"I don't dare go alone; you come and call out, and I'll hold the waiter," quavered poor Patty, looking sadly scared as the long train rolled by with a head at every window.

"Don't be a goose. Stay here and work, then; I'll go and sell every basket. I'm so mad about these poor things, I ain't afraid of anybody," cried Tilda, with a last refreshing splash among the few favored sheep, as she caught up the tray and marched off to the platform, — a very hot, wet, shabby little girl, but with a breast full of the just indignation and tender pity that go to redress half the wrongs of this great world.

"Oh, mamma, see the pretty baskets! do buy some, I'm so thirsty and tired," exclaimed more than one eager little traveller, as Tilda held up her tray, crying bravely, —

"Fresh berries! fresh berries! ten cents! only ten cents!"

They were all gone in ten minutes; and if Patty had been with her, the pail might have been emptied before the train left. But the other little Samaritan was hard at work; and when her sister joined her, proudly displaying a handful of silver, she was prouder still to show her woolly invalid feebly nibbling grass from her hand.

"We might have sold every one, — folks liked 'em ever so much; and next time we'll have two dozen baskets apiece. But we'll have to be spry, for some of the children fuss about picking out the one they like. It's real fun, Patty," said Tilda, tying up the precious dimes in a corner of her dingy little handkerchief.

"So 's this," answered the other, with a last loving pat of her patient's nose, as the train began to move, and car after car of suffering sheep passed them with plaintive cries and vain efforts to reach the blessed water of which they were in such dreadful need.

Poor Patty could n't bear it. She was hot, tired and unhappy because she could do so little; and when her pitying eyes lost sight of that load of misery, she just sat down and cried.

But Tilda scolded as she carefully put the unsold berries back into the pail, still unconscious of the people behind the elder-bushes by the pond.

"That 's the wickedest thing that ever was; and I just wish I was a man, so I could see about it. I 'd put all the railroad folks in those cars, and keep 'em there hours and hours and hours, going by ponds all the time; and I 'd have ice-cream, too, where they could n't get a bit, and lots of fans, and other folks all cool and comfortable, never caring how hot and tired and thirsty they were. Yes, I would! and then we 'd see how *they* like it."

Here indignant Tilda had to stop for breath, and refreshed herself by sucking berry-juice off her fingers.

"We *must* do something about it. I can't be happy to think of those poor lammies going so far without any water. It 's awful to be dry," sobbed Patty, drinking her own tears as they fell.

"If I had a hose, I 'd come every day and hose all over the cars; that would do some good. Anyway, we 'll bring the other big pail, and water all we can," said Tilda, whose active brain was always ready with a plan.

"Then we sha'n't sell our berries," began Patty, despondently; for all the world was saddened to her just then by the sight she had seen.

"We'll come earlier, and both work real hard till our train is in. Then I'll sell, and you go on watering with both pails. It's hard work, but we can take turns. Whatever shall we do with all these berries? The under ones are smashed, so we'll eat 'em; but these are nice, only who will buy 'em?" And Tilda looked soberly at the spoiled apron and the four quarts of raspberries picked with so much care in the hot sun.

"I will," said a pleasant voice; and a young lady came out from the bushes just as the good fairy appears to the maidens in old tales.

Both little girls started and stared, and were covered with confusion when other heads popped up, and a stout gentleman came toward them, smiling so good-naturedly that they were not afraid.

"We are having a picnic in the woods, and would like these nice berries for our supper, if you want to sell them," said the lady, holding out a pretty basket.

"Yes, ma'am, we do. You can have 'em all. They're a little mashed; so we won't ask but ten cents a quart, though we expected to get twelve," said Tilda, who was a real Yankee, and had an eye to business.

"What do you charge for watering the sheep?" asked the stout gentleman, looking kindly at Patty, who at once retired into the depths of her sun-bonnet, like a snail into its shell.

"Nothing, sir. Wasn't it horrid to see those poor things? That's what made her cry. She's real tender-hearted, and she couldn't bear it; so we let the berries go, and did what we could," answered Tilda, with such an earnest little face that it looked pretty in spite of tan and freckles and dust.

"Yes, it was very sad, and we must see about it. Here's something to pay for the berries, also for the water." And the gentleman threw a bright half-dollar into Tilda's lap and another into Patty's, just as if he was used to tossing money about in that delightful manner.

The little girls didn't know what to say to him; but they beamed at every one, and surveyed the pretty silver pieces as if they were very precious in their sight.

"What will you do with them?" asked the lady, in the friendly sort of voice that always gets a ready answer.

"Oh, we are saving up to buy books and rubber boots, so we can go to school next winter. We live two miles from school, and wear out lots of boots, and get colds when it's wet. We had *Pewmonia* last spring, and ma said we *must* have rubber boots, and we might earn 'em in berry-time," said Tilda eagerly.

"Yes, and *she*'s real smart, and *she*'s going to be promoted, and *must* have new books, and they cost so much, and ma ain't rich, so we get 'em ourselves," added sister Patty, forgetting bashfulness in sisterly pride.

"That's brave. How much will it take for the boots and the books?" asked the lady, with a glance at the old gentleman, who was eating berries out of her basket.

"As much as five dollars, I guess. We want to get a shawl for ma, so she can go to meetin'. It's a secret, and we pick every day real hard, 'cause berries don't last long," said Tilda, wisely.

"*She* thought of coming down here. We felt so bad about losing our place at the hotel, and did n't know what to do, till Tilda made this

plan. I think it's a splendid one." And Patty eyed her half-dollar with immense satisfaction.

"Don't spoil the plan, Alice. I'm passing every week while you are up here, and I'll see to the success of the affair," said the old gentleman, with a nod, adding, in a louder tone, "These are very fine berries, and I want you to take four quarts every other day to Miller's farm over there. You know the place?"

"Yes, sir! yes, sir!" cried two eager voices; for the children felt as if a rain of half-dollars was about to set in.

"I come up every Saturday and go down Monday; and I shall look out for you here, and you can water the sheep as much as you like. They need it, poor beasts!" added the old gentleman.

"We will, sir! we will!" cried the children, with faces so full of innocent gratitude and good will that the young lady stooped and kissed them both.

"Now, my dear, we must be off, and not keep our friends waiting any longer," said the old gentleman, turning toward the heads still bobbing about behind the bushes.

"Good-by, good-by. We won't forget the berries and the sheep," called the children,

waving the stained apron like a banner, and showing every white tooth in the beaming smiles they sent after these new friends.

"Nor I my lambs," said Alice to herself, as she followed her father to the boat.

"What will ma say when we tell her, and show her this heap of money?" exclaimed Tilda, pouring the dimes into her lap, and rapturously chinking the big half-dollars before she tied them all up again.

"I hope we sha'n't be robbed going home. You'd better hide it in your breast, else some one might see it," said prudent Patty, oppressed by the responsibility of so much wealth.

"There goes the boat!" cried Tilda. "Don't it look lovely? Those are the nicest folks I ever saw."

"She's perfectly elegant. I'd like a white dress and a hat just like that. When she kissed me, the long feather was as soft as a bird's wing on my cheeks, and her hair was all curling round like the picture we cut out of the paper." And Patty gazed after the boat as if this little touch of romance in her hard-working life was delightful to her.

"They must be awful rich, to want so many berries. We shall have to fly round to get

enough for them and the car folks too. Let's go right off now to that thick place we left this morning, else Elviry may get ahead of us," said practical Tilda, jumping up, ready to make hay while the sun shone. But neither of them dreamed what a fine crop they were to get in that summer, all owing to their readiness in answering that pitiful "Baa! baa!"

Baa the Second.

A very warm and a very busy week followed, for the berries were punctually delivered at the farm, and successfully sold at the station; and best of all, the sheep were as faithfully watered as two little pails and two little girls could do it. Every one else forgot them. Mr. Benson was a busy old gentleman far away in the city; Miss Alice was driving, boating, and picnicking all day long; and the men at the depot had no orders to care for the poor beasts. But Tilda and Patty never forgot; and, rain or shine, they were there when the long train came in, waiting to do what they could, with dripping pails, handfuls of grass, or green branches, to refresh these suffering travellers for whom no thought was taken.

The rough stage-drivers laughed at them, the brakemen ordered them away, and the station-master said they were "little fools;" but nothing daunted the small sisters of charity, and in a few days they were let alone. Their arms were very tired lifting the pails, their backs ached with lugging so much water, and mother would not let them wear any but their oldest clothes for such wet work; so they had their trials, but bore them bravely, and never expected to be thanked.

When Saturday came round, and Miss Alice drove to meet her father, she remembered the little girls, and looked for them. Up at the farm she enjoyed her berries, and ordered them to be promptly paid for, but was either asleep or away when they arrived, and so had not seen the children. The sight of Patty, hastily scrambling a clean apron over her old frock, as she waited for the train with her tray of fruit, made the young lady leave the phaeton and go to meet the child, asking, with a smile, —

"Where is the black-eyed sister? Not ill, I hope."

"No, ma'am; she 's watering the sheep. She 's so strong she does it better 'n I do, and

I sell the baskets," answered Patty, rejoicing secretly in the clean faded apron that hid her shabbiness.

"Ah, I forgot *my* lambs; but you were faithful to yours, you good little things! Have you done it every day?"

"Yes, 'm. Ma said, if we promised, we *must* do it; and we like it. Only there 's such a lot of 'em, and we get pretty tired." And Patty rubbed her arms as if they ached.

"I 'll speak to papa about it this very day. It will be a good time; for Mr. Jacobs, the president of the road, is coming up to spend Sunday, and they must do something for the poor beasts," said Miss Alice, ashamed to be outdone by two little girls.

"That will be so nice. We read a piece in a paper our teacher lends us, and I brought it down to show Mr. Weed, the depot man. He said it was a shame, but nobody could help it; so we thought we 'd tell him about the law we found." And Patty eagerly drew a worn copy of "Our Dumb Animals," from her pocket to show the little paragraph to this all-powerful friend who knew the railroad king.

Miss Alice read: —

"An act of Congress provides that at the end of every twenty-eight hours' journey animals shall be given five hours' rest, and duly fed and watered, unless shipped in cars having accommodations for the care of live-stock on board."

"There!" cried Patty, "that's the law; and ma says these sheep come ever so far, and ought to be watered. Do tell the president, and ask him to see to it. There was another piece about some poor pigs and cows being ninety-two hours without water and food. It was awful."

"I *will* tell him. Here's our train. Run to your berries. I'll find papa, and show him this."

As Miss Alice spoke, the cars thundered into the little station, and a brief bustle ensued, during which Patty was too busy to see what happened.

Mr. Benson and another stout old gentleman got out; and the minute Miss Alice had been kissed, she said very earnestly, —

"Wait a little, please; I want to settle a very important piece of business before we go home."

Then, while the gentlemen listened indulgently, she told the story, showed the bit in the paper, and pointing out Patty, added warmly, —

"That's one good child. Come and see the other, and you will agree with me that something ought to be done to relieve their kind little hearts and arms, if not out of mercy to the animals, who can't be called dumb in this case, though *we* have been deaf too long."

"My wilful girl must have her way. Come and get a whiff of fresh air, Jacobs." And Mr. Benson followed his daughter across the track, glad to get out of the bustle.

Yes, Tilda was there, and at work so energetically that they dared not approach, but stood looking and laughing for a moment. Two pails of water stood near her, and with a long-handled dipper she was serving all she could reach; those which were packed on the upper tier she could only refresh by a well-aimed splash, which was eagerly welcomed, and much enjoyed by all parties, — for Tilda got well showered herself, but did not care a bit, for it was a melting July day.

"That is a very little thing to do, but it is the cup of cold water which *we* have forgotten," said Miss Alice, softly, while the air was full of cries of longing as the blue lake shone before the thirsty beasts.

"Jacobs, we must attend to this."

"Benson, we will. I 'll look into the matter, and report at the next meeting."

That was all they said; but Alice clapped her hands, for she knew the thing would be done, and smiled like sunshine on the two old gentlemen, who presently watched the long train rumble away, with shakes and nods of the gray heads, which expressed both pity and determination.

The other train soon followed, and Patty came running over with her empty tray and a handful of silver to join Tilda, who sat down upon her upturned pail, tired out.

"Papa will see to it, children; and, thanks to you, the sheep will soon be more comfortable," said Miss Alice, joining them.

"Oh, goody! I hope they 'll be quick; it's so hot, there 's ever so many dead ones to-day, and I can't help 'em," answered Tilda, fanning herself with her bonnet, and wiping the drops off her red face.

Miss Alice took a pretty straw fan out of her pocket and handed it to her, with a look of respect for the faithful little soul who did her duty so well.

"Ask for me when you come to the farm to-night. I shall have some hats and aprons for you, and I want to know you better," she said,

remembering the broad-brimmed hats and ready-made aprons in the village store.

"Thank you, ma'am. We 'll come. Now we won't have to do this wet work we' d like to be neat and nice," said Patty, gratefully.

"Do you always sell all your berries down here?" asked Miss Alice, watching Tilda tie up the dimes.

"Yes, indeed; and we could sell more if both of us went. But ma said we were making lots of money, and it was n't best to get rich too fast," answered Tilda, wisely.

"That 's a good thing for us to remember, Benson, especially just now, and not count the cost of this little improvement in our cattle cars too closely," said Mr. Jacobs, as the old gentlemen came up in time to hear Tilda's speech.

"Your mother is a remarkable woman; I must come and see her," added Mr. Benson.

"Yes, sir; she is. She 'd be pleased to see you any day." And Tilda stood up respectfully as her elders addressed her.

"Getting too rich, are you? Then I suppose it would n't do to ask you to invest this in your business for me?" asked Mr. Jacobs, holding up two silver dollars, as if he felt bashful about offering them.

Two pairs of eyes sparkled; and Patty's hand went out involuntarily, as she thought how many things she could get with all that money.

"Would they buy a lamb? and would you like to use it that way?" asked Tilda, in a business-like tone.

"I guess Miller would let you have one for that sum if Miss Alice makes the bargain, and I *should* very much like to start a flock if you would attend to it for me," answered Mr. Jacobs, with a laughing nod at the young lady, who seemed to understand that way of making bargains.

"We'd like it ever so much! We've wanted a lamb all summer; and we've got a nice rocky pasture, with lots of pennyroyal and berry bushes and a brook, for it to live in. We could get one ourselves now we are so rich; but we'd rather buy more things for ma, and mend the roof 'fore the snow comes: it's so old, rain runs down on our bed sometimes."

"That's bad; but you seem fond of water, and look as if it agreed with you," said Mr. Jacobs, playfully poking Tilda's soaked apron with his cane.

They all laughed; and Mr. Benson said, looking at his watch, —

"Come, Alice, we must go. I want my dinner, and so does Jacobs. Good-by, little water-witches. I 'll see you again."

"Do you s'pose they 'll remember the lambs and hats, and all they promised?" asked Patty, as the others turned away.

"I don't believe they will. Rich folks are so busy having good times they are apt to forget poor folks, seems to me," answered Tilda, shaking her head like a little Solomon.

"Bless my heart, what a sharp child that is! We must not disappoint her: so remind me, Alice, to make a memorandum of all this business," whispered Mr. Benson, who heard every word.

"The President is a *very* nice man, and I know *he* 'll keep his word. See! he dropped the money in my tray, and I never saw him do it," cried Patty, pouncing on the dollars like a robin on a worm.

"There 's a compliment for you, and well worth the money. Such confidence is beautiful," said Mr. Jacobs, laughing.

"Well, I 've learned a little lesson, and I 'll lay it to heart so well I won't let either of you

forget," added Alice, as they drove away; while Tilda and Patty trudged home, quite unconscious that they had set an example which their elders were not ashamed to follow.

So many delightful things happened after this that the children felt as if they had got into a fairy tale. First of all, two nice rough straw hats and four useful aprons were given them that very night. Next day Miss Alice went to see their mother, and found an excellent woman, trying to bring up her girls, with no one to help her.

Then somehow the roof got mended, and the fence, so that passing cattle could not devastate the little beds where the children carefully cultivated wild flowers from the woods and hills. There seemed to be a sudden call for berries in the neighborhood, — for the story of the small Samaritans went about, and even while they laughed, people felt an interest in the children, and were glad to help them; so the dimes in the spoutless teapot rose like a silver tide, and visions of new gowns, and maybe sleds, danced through the busy little brains.

But, best and most wonderful of all, the old gentlemen did *not* forget the sheep. It was astonishing how quickly and easily it was all

done, when once those who had the power found both the will and the way. Every one was interested now: the stage-drivers joked no more; the brakemen lent a hand with the buckets while waiting for better means of relief; and cross Mr. Weed patted Tilda and Patty on the head, and pointed them out to strangers as the "nice little girls who stirred up the railroad folks." Children from the hotel came to look at them, and Elviry Morris was filled with regret that she had no share in this interesting affair.

Thus the little pail of water they offered for pity's sake kept the memory of this much-needed mercy green till the lake poured its full tide along the channel made for it, and there was no more suffering on that road.

The first day the new pumps were tried every one went to see them work; and earliest of all were Tilda and Patty, in pink aprons and wreaths of evergreens round their new hats, in honor of the day. It was sweet to see their intense satisfaction as the water streamed into the troughs, and the thirsty sheep drank so gratefully. The innocent little souls did not know how many approving glances were cast upon them as they sat on a log, with the

tired arms folded, two trays of berries at their feet now, and two faces beaming with the joy of a great hope beautifully fulfilled.

Presently a party from the hotel appeared; and something was evidently going to happen, for the boys and girls kept dodging behind the cars to see if they were coming. Tilda and Patty wondered who or what, but kept modestly apart upon their log, glad to see that the fine folks enjoyed the sight about as much as they did.

A rattle was heard along the road, a wagon stopped behind the station, and an excited boy came flying over the track to make the mysterious announcement to the other children, —

"They've got 'em, and they are regular beauties."

"More pumps or troughs, I guess. Well, we can't have too many," said Tilda, with an eye to the business under way.

"I wish those folks would n't stare so. I s'pose it 's the new aprons with pockets," whispered bashful Patty, longing for the old cape-bonnet to retire into.

But both forgot pumps and pockets in a moment, as a striking procession appeared round the corner. Mr. Benson, trying not to laugh,

but shining with heat and fun, led a very white lamb with a red bow on its neck; and behind him came Miss Alice, leading another lamb with a blue bow. She looked very much in earnest, and more like a good fairy than ever, as she carried out her little surprise. People looked and laughed; but every one seemed to understand the joke at once, and were very quiet when Mr. Benson held up his hand, and said, in a voice which was earnest as well as merry, —

"Here, my little girls, are two friends of those poor fellows yonder come to thank you for your pity, and to prove, I hope, that rich people are not always too busy with their own good times to remember their poorer neighbors. Take them, my dears, and God bless you!"

"I didn't forget my lambs this time, but have been taming these for you; and Mr. Jacobs begs you will accept them, with his love," added Miss Alice, as the two pretty creatures were led up to their new owners, wagging their tails and working their noses in the most amiable manner, though evidently much amazed at the scene.

Tilda and Patty were so surprised that they were dumb with delight, and could only blush

and pat the woolly heads, feeling more like story-book girls than ever. The other children, charmed with this pleasant ending to the pretty story, set up a cheer; the men joined in it with a will; while the ladies waved their parasols, and all the sheep seemed to add to the chorus their grateful "Baa! baa!"

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